

Community Groups

Introduction. Community or community groups are very important to the life and health of the Church. Community is a critical part of sanctification and growth for a believer and is thus a crucial aspect of our lives. Community groups are simply a tool to encourage biblical and spiritual interaction with each other.

What does “Community” mean? First, it is important to understand what is meant by fellowship or community. Often we think of a fellowship meal: “fun, food, and fellowship.” We even have fellowship halls. So, if asked, “What is fellowship?” We think, Ok, the fellowship hall is by the kitchen and when we use it we are always eating so I guess fellowship is eating, yes, that’s my answer; fellowship is eating.

Community/fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*) in the New Testament was often used as a general Greek word and was used of a business partnership in which two or more people shared a business and this word was also at times used of a marriage. *Koinonia* is a common union, interest, participation, and co-operation, it is being together, united. We see many similar ideas through different biblical word pictures. I think of family, body (1 Cor.12:12-27; Eph.1:22-23), and “brother/sister” references for instance.

How do we have this union or community? We have it *in* Christ (Rom. 6:4, 6, 11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 2:20; 3:3)! Further, we see that *koinonia* in Scripture means we have intimacy with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), God the Father (1 Jn. 1:3), God the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), and each other (2 Cor. 8:4; 1 Jn. 1:7).

Our union one to another is much deeper than merely eating together. It is more intimate and real, it is truly eternal! Further, it is not merely we that are together, we are together with God in Christ. So our communion is much more significant than just eating together, though that can and I think should be an outworking of our union with Christ.

Our union with Christ gives us a realistic expectation for fellowship. We know that we are at the same time saints and sinners. We therefore don’t expect perfection, we expect people’s lives to be a little messy. We expect to be patient with each other and help each other out.

When we remember where our community comes from it protects against the error of thinking that fellowship is simply socializing, i.e. food, fun, and football. It also protects us from thinking that in our community groups we will experience heaven on earth. As we understand more and more where our community lies, we will have more community.

What is a Community Group? A community group is a small group of often diverse people that intentionally share life together in order to encourage each other. Community groups are a pragmatic way that the modern Church has sought to fulfill the various “one another” passages. Remember, the book of Hebrews says to consider, that is, think about, how to stir each other up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). Well, we at Grace Crossing have thought about it, and community groups are a good way to stir up each other for good works.

It is through the church that we are “equipped for the work of the ministry” and “built up into Him who is the head.” It is in Christ through connection with the church that individuals within the church are nourished and grow together (Col. 2:19). Perseverance is a community endeavor. We need to be provoked to good works.

On an aside, it may be helpful to remember the example of Jesus. If anyone did not need fellowship with others it was Jesus. Yet, He spent almost all His time with His followers. He prayed with them, ate with them, walked with them, taught them, and went through life with them.

Elements of a Community Group. In Acts 2:42 we see a glimpse of what fellowship was like for the early church. It says they continually devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. There are at least six important elements of each community group.

1) Bible Study: The early church was continually devoted to teaching and we, as our Core Values say, want the Word of God to be central in all we do as a church. It is the Word of God that makes us competent and equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

2) Prayer: As our Core Values say we want our ministry to be “saturated in prayer” and this is just what we see in Acts. They devoted themselves to prayer (2:42).

3) Hospitality: One of the qualifications for an Elder is that he be hospitable. This points us to its importance. We also remember that the early church also broke bread together. That is, they ate together. This likely includes both regular meals and the Lord’s Supper.

4) Confession and Repentance: This is a sensitive subject and must be done with much wisdom and tact. However, we know from James that we are to confess our sins one to another (5:16) and Galatians chapter six tells us to bear one another’s burdens (6:1-5). There is likely no better place for these things to happen than in a community group.

5) Service: The service that we are to do is varied. We are to do good to all people and especially those in the church. We are to make disciples of all nations. Yet, we are to do those things in community. Yes, we need to do them on large scale as the whole church but it is also helpful to focus on service at a smaller more intimate level.

6) Worship: We hope at Grace Crossing that involvement in a community group will lead individuals to better love the LORD their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

There are also many “one another” passages that can only be carried out in a small familiar setting. Here is a sampling of the “one another” passages. Think about each of them and about the benefit community groups are to practice all the various aspects of life together.

We are to honor one another (Rom. 12:20). We are to accept one another (Rom. 15:7). We are to bear with bear with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13). We are to forgive one another (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). We are to pray for and confess sins to one another (James 5:16). We are to cheer and challenge one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25). We are to admonish and confront one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; Gal. 6:1-6). We are to warn one another (1 Thess. 5:14). We are to teach one another (Col. 3:16). We are to not be gossip, slander, or be fake with one another (Gal. 5:15; Rom. 12:9). We are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). We are to share possessions (Acts 4:32). We are to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). These “one anothers” most easily take place in community groups, please be involved in a Christian community/community group.

Mission of Community Groups. The mission of community groups is to encourage each other to Christ-like living for the sake of God’s Name among all the nations, to provide intentional outlets for all the “one another passages” in Scripture, to use as a catalyst to reach the lost people around us through intentional relational witness, and to promote more intimate Christian relationships.

Community Group Logistics. The Church should desire diverse community groups. That is, we want people to come together in relationship that outside of Christ would likely never partner together for anything. This is for many reasons. Diversity better pictures the Kingdom of God; in heaven there will be people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. If there is diversity in age than what Paul commends in Titus 2 can be put into practice; older men teaching younger men, and older women teaching younger women.

Conclusion. Although, we do not exactly see community groups in Scripture I believe that biblical community is vital to the health of individual Christians and to the corporate life of the church so I strongly encourage people to be connected to our church to be involved in one to community of believers whether in a “community group/small group/cell group or some other intimate gathering. Community groups may not be exactly biblical but they are designed to do biblical, God given, things. I, thus, implore you to be connected to a Christian community/ community group. I say this not merely because I think you should, not merely for my own spiritual health, not merely for your own spiritual health, but because I believe that God teaches in Scripture that it is important.